
Prepared for

**Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Division of Transportation Investment Management
Bureau of Planning**

November 2002

Final Report - Executive Summary

Focus Groups

Concerning WisDOT Transportation Planning

Connections

2030

Prepared by

**Wendy Blumenthal, Vice President
Zigman Joseph Stephenson
Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

Under the Supervision of

**Tries
& Rice, LLC**

322 East Michigan Street, Suite 600
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Summary & Findings

Overview of Results

While participants in each focus group had unique perspectives, there were a number of consistent themes heard in both sessions. These included:

- Major concern about Wisconsin's deteriorating transportation infrastructure and the availability of funds to repair and replace;
- Desire to find new funding alternatives for transportation, beyond the gas tax;
- Concern about the need for greater coordination between a state transportation plan and other areas that affect this plan, such as land use, environmental planning, local transportation plans, etc.;
- Call for the governor to take leadership role in transportation planning by articulating an overall vision for transportation in the state (with assistance from WisDOT) and/or acting as an arbiter to minimize conflicts between state departments and special interest groups;
- Develop non-traditional approaches to secure input from under-represented stakeholders; The recommended focus is outward, i.e., *"What are the needs and aspirations people have that can be addressed by transportation?"* rather than, *"What are our transportation system needs?"*

Among participants in the first session, a critical issue was insufficient definition of the objectives, content and desired outcomes / products of the long-range planning process.

External stakeholders, on the other hand, expressed concerns about *"controlling the impact of road builders"* in the planning process and increasing *"respect"* for modes of transportation other than the automobile.

Most Critical Transportation Issues

Both groups were asked to offer their ideas on the most critical transportation issues facing the state and then vote on the ideas mentioned. Although specific wording may have been different in each session, there was a great deal of consistency in the issues selected.

**Fig. 1: Critical Issues Identified by Participants
in Both Sessions**

<u>Critical Issue</u>	Votes Group #1	Votes Group #2	Total
Rebuilding Infrastructure (maintaining and enhancing the existing transportation system)	4	8	12
Transportation funding challenges	5	6	11
Transportation safety (enhancing the safety of our transportation system)	4	3	7
Investment management (choosing how to spend money)	5	--	5
Modal choice (improving / expanding the transportation options for state residents and business)	2	3	5
Aging of population/mobility needs (necessary enhancements to our transportation system needed to guarantee mobility of an aging population)	1	2	3
Highway capacity	3	--	3
Highway maintenance and operation	3	--	3
Meeting expectations regarding personal mobility	3	--	3
Environment / land use concerns (need to preserve and maintain natural / social environments while expanding / enhancing transportation system)	2	1	3

In addition to these issues, both sessions explored what other changes might occur during the next 25 years that would impact transportation planning. Among the topics raised:

- Funding crisis from reduced reliance on gasoline fuel, leading to a reduction in gas tax revenue;
- Increase in both truck and rail freight traffic;
- Growth in tourism in Wisconsin;
- Increasing urbanization;
- More multicultural issues and a growing bilingual population;
- Growing disconnect between where employment and employees are located;
- Difficulty preserving natural resources with increased demand;
- Impact of globalization;
- Possibility of a catastrophic occurrence; and
- Rapid changes in technology making 20 - 30 year planning cycles obsolete.

Recommendations to Ensure Effective Planning

At the conclusion of each session, participants were asked to offer their top recommendations regarding effective transportation planning, policy development and funding issues in Wisconsin. There were significant differences between the groups in these recommendations. Differences were generally based on the prior discussion and the experience of group participants.

WisDOT Staff

WisDOT staff generally focused on the process of planning. Suggestions included:

- Ensuring recommendations are data based;
- Including desired outcomes as part of plan recommendations;
- Managing expectations of public / legislature;
- Conducting a comprehensive debate on plan implementation;
- Focusing on how transportation affects the lives of state residents; and
- Utilizing stakeholder input to develop a shared vision across all modes.

External Stakeholders

The recommendations of opinion leaders often fell into the political arena. They suggested such things as:

- Reforming campaign finance laws to reduce special interest influence;
- Infusing WisDOT with new people who are not engineering/highway oriented;
- Broadening the base for transportation funding in the state (through such means as a sales tax for transportation, a massive gas tax increase or transferring auto-related sales tax monies into transportation);
- Decentralizing the planning process;
- Holding an interdisciplinary transportation summit; and
- Making it illegal for politicians to talk to planners.